

Michigan United Conservation Clubs

MUCC is the Home of: *Michigan Out-of-Doors*™ Magazine & *Michigan Out-of-Doors*™ Television

The Institute for Conservation Education: *Wildlife Encounters*™ • *Tracks*™ Magazine for Kids • Camp for Kids • Conservation Academy

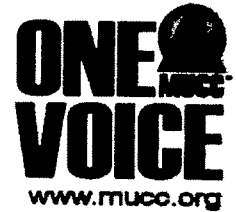
P.O. Box 30235

2101 Wood Street

Lansing, MI 48909-7735

Phone: 517/371-1041

FAX: 517/371-1505



House Committee on Great Lakes and the Environment

Thursday, December 3, 2009

Testimony of Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC)

Re: Senate Bills 388-89

Madame Chair and committee members, thank you for allowing Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) the opportunity to comment on Senate Bills 388-89. MUCC is Michigan's largest statewide conservation organization with over 40,000 individual members and 500 affiliated clubs.

Aside from being active in the outdoors, MUCC members understand that outdoor education and stewardship is the key to keeping Michigan's most treasured asset - our natural resources - available and abundant for future generations.

For many people in Michigan, our state parks, forests, and recreation areas are the first gateways to experience the wonder of Michigan's great out-of-doors. Unfortunately these gateways to recreation are deteriorating due to the lack of state general funds combined with the effects of old age and neglect - shoreline erosion, caved-in roofs, overgrown trails, crumbling boat ramps and roadways, rotting historic buildings, etc. Senate Bills 388 and 389, along with House Bills 4677 and 4678 are a refreshing example of bi-cameral and bi-partisan cooperation to solve one of our state's many challenging problems. But perhaps more importantly, it is also the calculated work-product of Michigan citizens through the Citizen's Committee for Michigan State Parks: sportsmen, state lawmakers, academics, state and park officials, local governments, and other citizen resource stewards all came together to craft this unique funding strategy for our state park system.

State parks are in need of sustainable funding in order to survive

MUCC is grateful for the opportunity to serve as a member of the Citizen's Committee and we're also proud that sportsmen and women have always paid for the conservation that sustains their recreational pursuits. However, just like other users groups that enjoy our state parks, sportsmen and women represent merely a fraction of the annual visitors and users of Michigan's 98 state park facilities. Since the 2004 elimination of general fund support for parks and conservation, recreational access, along with resource and habitat management, has fallen along with the economic condition of our state. As a result, eighteen percent of the funds allocated annually from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund to the State Parks Endowment Fund are now needed to in order to keep the gates open instead of funding essential infrastructure repairs and park improvements. Looking ahead to 2010 with purported 20 percent General Fund cuts, it has become clear that our parks are in desperate need of a sustainable funding structure. Without one, our state parks will no longer be able to provide access to the quality outdoor experiences we know Michigan has to offer.

State Parks improve our state's economy and quality of life

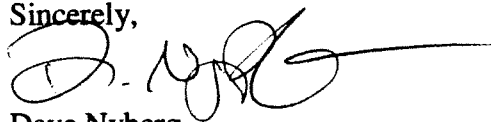
The state park system and the access it provides to sportsmen and other recreational users is also a key economic engine that - if healthy - will continue to produce state revenue and jobs. As you already know, tourism - supported by access through our state parks - is our state's third largest, ever-growing industry. Hunters, anglers, and trappers, who have gained recreational access through state parks since their inception, are a key component of that industry. In fact, sportsmen spend \$3.4 billion annually in the state, supporting roughly 46,000 jobs, \$1.7 billion in salaries, \$378 million in state and local tax revenue, and a \$5.9 billion ripple effect on the state economy. Combined, all travel related expenditures in Michigan in 2004 totaled \$17.2 billion, 72 percent of which came from tourism and outdoor recreation. This supported roughly 210,000 jobs.

State parks also provide critical habitat refuges for Michigan's native wildlife and fish. State game and wildlife provide more than 340,000 acres of non-urban habitat and most of this land is found in where 85% of Michigan's population lives, works, and plays. This land is managed to keep quality wildlife habitat while also providing optimal oriented outdoor recreation opportunities, which are rustic, yet adequately accessible for urban communities.

MUCC believes this bi-partisan, bi-cameral legislative proposal is a workable solution that gives Michigan's citizens a choice on whether or not to support our state parks at a time when the state parks need us most.

MUCC appreciates your hard work in passing the House counterpart to these bills earlier this year and respectfully asks for your continued support in voting for Senate Bills 388 and 389. Thank you in advance for your leadership in ensuring future generations may have access to the natural surroundings that enhance our quality of life and contribute to our social and economic prosperity in Michigan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Nyberg", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dave Nyberg
MUCC Government Relations Manager